

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9514

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3188

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE

SUBJ: HOW TO HOLD PARLIAMENT, LEBANESE-STYLE

1. LEBANESE PARLIAMENT MANAGED TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER IN QUESTIONABLE SECURITY CLIMATE 10 APRIL LONG ENOUGH TO AMEND ART. 73 OF CONSTITUTION. NOW THAT WE HAVE PASSED THIS INITIAL HURDLE, DEPT. MAY BE INTERESTED IN SOME OF FLAVOR OF SESSION WHICH MAY BE GREATEST FIREARMS EXTRAVAGANZA SINCE THE ORIGINAL SHOTGUN WEDDING. EMBOFF HAS DRAWN TOGETHER DETAILS OF SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, WHICH SUMMARIZED BELOW, FROM NUMBER OF ATTENDING JOURNALISTS AND OTHER EYEWITNESS REPORTS.

2. CENTER OF ACTIVITY AND SITE OF PARLIAMENTARY SITTING WAS VILLA ESSEILY WHICH LOCATED ON SHORT STREET, JUST OF ABDULLAH YAFFI AVENUE, RUNNING DIAGONALLY BETWEEN SURETE GENERAL AND MILITARY TRIBUNAL (AHDAB HEADQUARTERS). TWO PANHARD APCS CLOSED STREET BETWEEN VILLA AND POINT WHERE IT INTERSECTS DAMASCUS ROAD AND STAGHOUND ARMORED CAR WAS POISED AT SAME POINT WITH 90 MM GUN POINTED TOWARD ASHRAFIYEH. GREAT POINT WAS MADE OF FACT THAT "LEBANESE ARMY" PROVIDING SECURITY OUTSIDE VILLA, BUT HONOR GUARD DRAWN UP AT VILLA ENTRANCE WAS MOTLEY CREW WITH AT LEAST ONE SOLDIER WEARING KHEFIYAH(ARAB HEADDRESS) TIED ABOUT HIS WAIST AS BELT. M-113 APC WAS PARKED ON MAIN CORNICHE ABOVE HIPPODROME AND, LIKE SEVERAL OTHERS SPOTTED ABOUT WITHIN SECURITY CORDON, CONFIDENTIAL

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SHOWED SIGNS OF HAVING BEEN HASTILY PAINTED WHITE TO CONCEAL

FACT THAT ARMY HAD BORROWED IT BACK FOR OCCASION FROM WHAT-EVER FACTION HAD APPROPRIATED IT. GEN. AHDAB, NOMINAL COMMANDER OF THE SECURITY FORCES, WAS CHICLY ATTIRED IN FULL DRESS UNIFORM AND SPORTED FANCY 9MM SIDEARM AND SINGLE HAND GRENADE AT HIS BELT. HE CARRIED A SHORT BULL-WHIP IN HIS HAND WHICH HE SLAPPED AGAINST HIS LEG BEFORE RETIRING TO AN UPPER BALCONY OF HIS HEADQUARTERS IN THE ADJACENT MILITARY TRIBUNAL TO SURVEY HIS EMPIRE.

3. OUTER PERIMETER OF ZONE, WHICH EXTENDED TO BARBIR HOSPITAL IN WEST, WAS MANNED BY NO-NONSENSE GROUPS OF PLA AND/OR SA'IQA FORCES WHO STRICTLY CONTROLLED ACCESS (PRESUMABLY PHAL-ANGE, ETC. PERFORMED SAME FUNCTION AT PALAIS DE JUSTICE FRONTIER IN EAST). WITHIN ZONE, MURABITOUN ELEMENTS, WITH JEEP-MOUNTED RECOILESS RIFLES AND HEAVY MACHINE GUNS, MOUNTED FIXED POSITIONS AND MANNED INTERIOR CHECKPOINTS. FURTHER UNITS TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED AS PLA WERE STATIONED UP SIDE STREETS TO PREVENT INFILTRATION FROM NORTH AND SOUTH.

4. PARIAMENTARIANS ARRIVED AT VILLA IN THEIR OWN VEHICLES, CHRISTIANS GENERALLY ENTERING ZONE FROM EAST AND MUSLIMS FROM WEST. MOST EXHIBITED THEIR LACK OF CONFIDENCE BY BRINGING AT LEAST ONE CARLOAD OF THEIR OWN PERSONAL ARMED TOUGHS. SHEIKH PIERRE GEMAYEL, FOR EXAMPLE, MADE HIS ENTRANCE IN NEW FIRE-ENGINE RED RANGE-ROVER (WITH BRITISH PLATES) FOLLOWED BY BUICK-LOAD OF LOYALISTS BRANDISHING AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND ANTI-TANK ROCKETS. THEORETICALLY AT LEAST, CHRISTIAN DEPUTIES WERE INTERCEPTED AT OUTER PERIMETER BY CHRISTIAN OFFICERS OF LEBANESE ARMY AND ESCORTED TO VILLA; MUSLIMS WERE GUIDED BY MUSLIM OFFICERS.

5. ALTHOUGH ATMOSPHERE WAS "TAUT" ACCORDING TO ONE EXPERIENCED OBSERVER, ARRANGEMENTS WORKED REMARKABLY WELL DURING ARRIVAL CEREMONIES. AT END OF BRIEF SESSION, HOWEVER, DECORUM BEGAN TO WEAR THIN. WHEN CHAMOUN, ONE OF FIRST TO EXIT VILLA, CAME OUT, A SHOT WAS HEARD IN DISTANCE AND ALMOST ENTIRE SECURITY CONTINGENT BROKE FOR COVER AND, EVEN WHEN THEY DEEMED IT SAFE TO RETURN, THEY NEVER AGAIN QUITE GOT INTO FORMATION. INSTEAD, THEY JOINED GENERAL MELEE AT VILLA ENTRANCE AS DEPUTIES VIED WITH

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ONE ANOTHER FOR PRECEDENCE AND CHAUFFEURS SOUGHT TO BEAT THEIR RIVALS TO THE DOORSTEP. UNLIKE RELATIVELY RESTRAINED ASSEMBLY, DISPERSAL OF DEPUTIES BROUGHT TEARS TO EYES OF OLD-TIME BEIRUT HANDS AS THEY THOUGHT NOSTALGICALLY OF THE MAD JOSTLING IN FRONT OF THE HAMRA CINEMA AT 2125 HOURS ON A SATURDAY NIGHT. TWO GOONS ACCOMPANYING ABDUL MAJID AL RAFA'I, PRO-IRAQI BAATH DEPUTY FROM TRIPOLI, BECAME SO CAUGHT UP IN WATCHING THE SPECTACLE THAT THEY FAILED TO SEE THEIR VEHICLE PULLING

AWAY AND RAN AFTER IT FOR ALMOST A BLOCK BEFORE THEY WERE
ABLE TO CLAMBER IN THE REAR WINDOWS, PULLING THEIR RPG ROCKETS
IN BEHIND THEM. ONE NEWS CAMERAMAN WAS STRUCK BY A CAR ATTEMPT-
ING TO BEAT OUT THAT OF ANOTHER DEPUTY. GENERAL CONFUSION
REIGNED.

6. FOR ALL OF ITS OPERA BOUFFE ATMOSPHERE, OF COURSE, THE
PARLIAMENT DID ITS WORK WITHOUT THE MAJOR INCIDENTS WHICH MANY
OF THE PROPHETS OF GLOOM PREDICTED. THE ONLY INCIDENTS OCCASIONED
BY CLOSE PROXIMITY OF RIVAL GUNMEN WHO HAVE BEEN FIGHTING ONE
ANOTHER AT A DISTANCE FOR A YEAR--DID NOT GET OUT OF HAND. IN
A CAPSULE, HOWEVER, THE ABSURDITIES AND INCONSISTENCIES WHICH
ATTENDED THE MEETING OF PARLIAMENT ILLUMINATE THE DIFFICULTIES
WHICH THE LEBANESE AND THOSE WHO SEEK TO ASSIST THEM WILL FACE
IN EDGING THIS COUNTRY DOWN THE ROAD TOWARD SANITY.
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